COMMONWEALTH DAY
IN THE SCHOOLS OF ONTARIO
MAY 16, 1958

SOME DETAILS OF THE OPENING OF

THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA

BY

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

ON

OCTOBER 14, 1957

OHEC
394.26
9713
059DE/C
1958
Copy 1

Issued by Authority of
THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

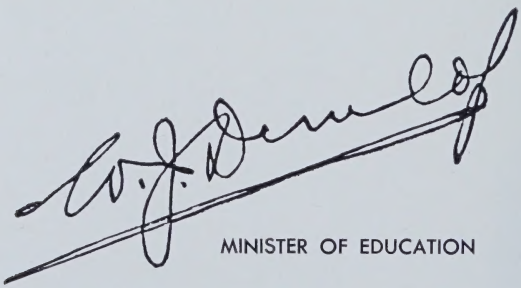
ONTARIO

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

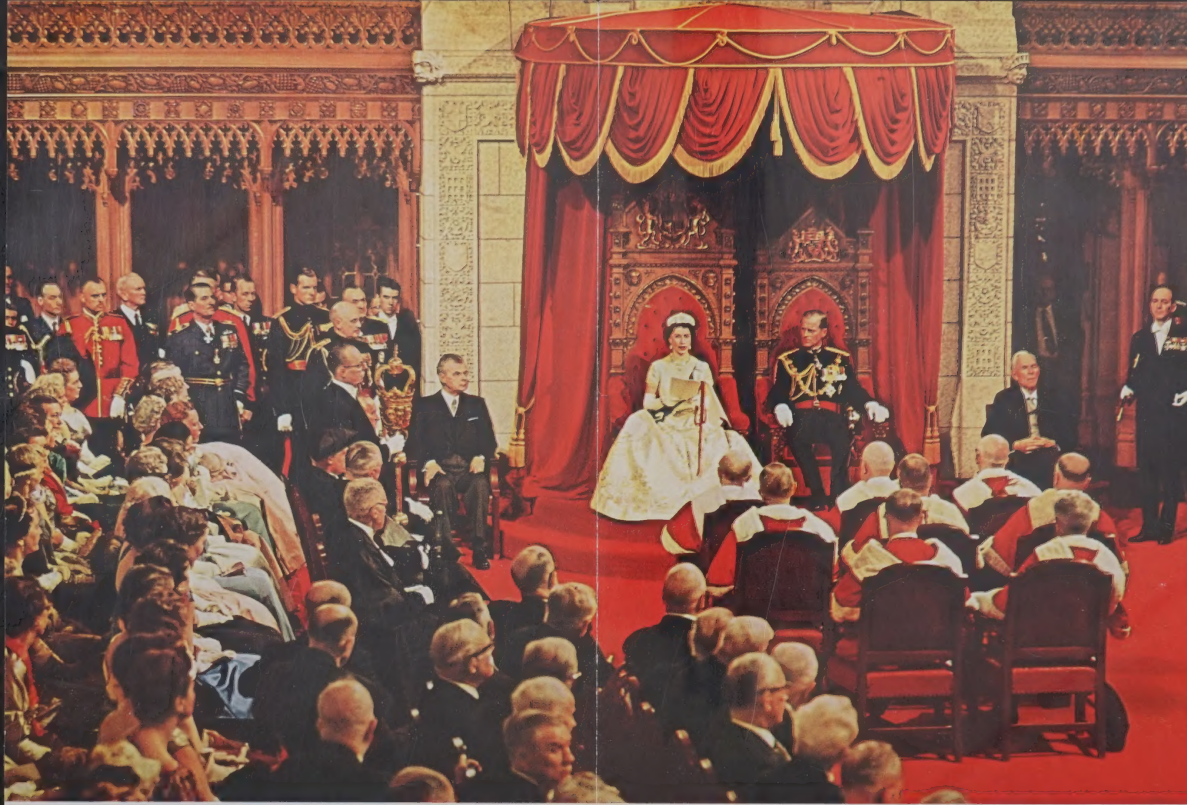
FOREWORD FROM THE MINISTER

This booklet is built around a remarkable photograph of an outstanding event in Canadian history. The opening of the session of the Parliament of Canada on October 14, 1957, with the ceremony performed for the first time by the reigning Sovereign, was a most noteworthy occasion and there were many significant details of pageantry and tradition to be observed in the various parts of the ceremony.

A study of the picture which is the centre page of this booklet will draw attention to a number of these details which can be linked to the long history of the British people and the gradual evolution of our parliamentary institutions. May I suggest that the coloured photograph be removed from this booklet and placed on the display board in the classroom where all the pupils may study it? The details of the picture might well be made the subject of several lessons related to the observance of Commonwealth Day on May 16, 1958.



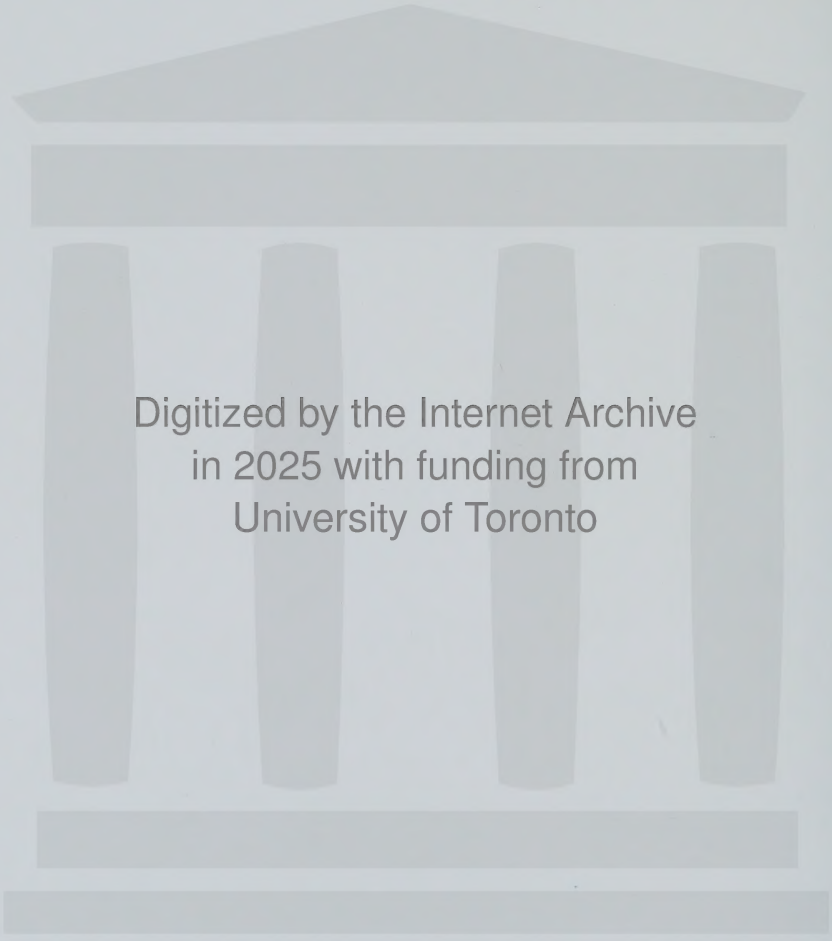
MINISTER OF EDUCATION



HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN OPENING THE CANADIAN PARLIAMENT

October 14, 1957

Photo by MALAK


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
University of Toronto

https://archive.org/details/commonwealthdayi00onta_0

THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA

Her Majesty the Queen, reading the Speech from the Throne in the Senate Chamber of the Parliament Buildings at Ottawa on October 14, 1957, began with these words:

"Honourable members of the Senate, members of the House of Commons, I greet you as your Queen. Together we constitute the Parliament of Canada."

The only occasions when the whole of the Canadian parliament meets together are at the ceremonies attending the opening or closing of a session. Ordinarily, at the opening, the Governor-General representing the Sovereign, reads the Speech from the Throne announcing the matters with which Parliament will be asked to deal. At the end of the session he attends to give Royal Assent to the Acts which have been passed. On both occasions the members of the House of Commons are summoned to the Senate Chamber.

The picture which is the centre page of this booklet was taken in the Senate Chamber while the Queen was reading the Speech from the Throne on that historic occasion when for the first time in Canadian history the Sovereign was present in person for the opening of Parliament. The Queen and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, occupy the thrones. A number of Senators can be seen in the left foreground, but the regular seats which the Senators occupy were for this ceremony reserved for ladies, wives of Senators and Members, and invited guests, while the Senators are on extra chairs in the aisle. The Prime Minister sits at the left, that is, on the Queen's right hand. On the other side is the Government Leader of the Senate.

THE QUEEN ON THE THRONE

In the place of honour in the Senate Chamber there are two thrones set upon a slightly-raised platform. A canopy of crimson and gold hangs over them. The throne upon which the Queen sits has these marks of distinction: its back is higher and it has a larger coat of arms; it is placed slightly further forward; and, being on the left as the audience faces it, it is on the right or position of greater honour* for its occupant. These differences emphasize the fact that the Queen is the reigning Sovereign and that Prince Philip takes second place in order of precedence.

The Queen and Prince Philip entered the Senate Chamber in a procession led by the official known as Black Rod; they were followed in the procession by the Prime Minister and the Government Leader of the Senate, and they in turn were followed by the Aides-de-camp. The royal couple were escorted to their thrones and the Prime Minister took his place at the Queen's right hand.

* The idea of the right hand as the position of honour is of great antiquity. There are references to it in the Bible. In processions and seating arrangements the person of greatest distinction occupies the centre, or the right of the central position. The same distinctions are observed in the arrangement of flags. The right of the line is the position of honour in military or naval reviews. In the House of Commons and other legislative bodies the Government party sits on the Speaker's right.

A group of eight men in red and white robes can be seen in the picture, facing the Queen. These are the Judges of the Supreme Court of Canada.

THE SUPREME COURT OF CANADA

In the British Parliament the presiding officer in the House of Lords is the Lord Chancellor. He sits on a large cushion known as the Woolsack, which owes its name to its having been originally a bag tightly packed with wool and owes its significance to a time in the 15th and 16th centuries when it served as a reminder that the national wealth and prosperity of England were based on the production, manufacture, and export of woollen goods.

Besides being the leader of the House of Lords the Lord Chancellor presides also as the senior judge of the highest court of law. That is why, in the opening of our Parliament the Chief Justice and the Judges of the Supreme Court of Canada occupy seats (chairs rather than a woollen cushion) on the floor of the Senate Chamber facing the Throne. They represent another part of government. Parliament is supreme in making the laws of the country. The Supreme Court is the highest authority in the interpretation of the law and the administration of justice and equity.

In Norman times, trials were held before the King in his court or palace, and the King himself gave the decision. With so many duties to perform the ruler was soon forced to appoint others to act for him, giving decisions still in the name of the King. The place of trial, whether it was in London or elsewhere, retained the name of court. The scarlet robes of the Judges of our Supreme Court are a reminder that their authority comes from the Sovereign, in whose name they give their decisions as the highest judicial body in Canada.

On the extreme right of the picture is the official known as Black Rod, formally dressed, wearing a sword, and holding over his right shoulder the black gold-banded rod from which he gets his title.

BLACK ROD

The office of Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod can be traced in England back to 1350. The duties of the office in the British Parliament are now carried out chiefly in the House of Lords while in the Canadian Parliament Black Rod is an officer, but not a member, of the Senate. His position corresponds to that of the Sergeant-at-Arms in the House of Commons; that is to say, he is responsible, under the Speaker, for maintaining order. Within the House of Lords he acts on occasion as the personal attendant of the Sovereign and of course he has the same function in the Senate Chamber. His symbol of office is an ebony rod decorated with gold and he wears at his side a sword which is symbolic rather than useful.

Standing at the left, close to the seated Prime Minister, the Sergeant-at-Arms can be seen with the great gold mace which has at its upper end a large crown.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS AND THE MACE

The mace was originally a weapon of war, a kind of club, used in hand-to-hand fighting. In the Bayeux tapestry, which depicts the events of the Norman Invasion of 1066, the Bishop of

Bayeux is shown carrying a mace at the Battle of Hastings. (Bishops could defend themselves but were not supposed to shed blood.) The custom of having a royal body-guard, armed with a mace and called a sergeant-at-arms, was established in England by King Richard I.

Gradually the mace became a symbol of authority rather than a weapon of defence and its shape was changed. Where it represents authority derived from the Crown the crown has become the chief feature in its design.*

The English House of Commons acquired a mace of approved design in 1649. This was the mace which, when he turned out the remaining members of that Parliament in 1653, Cromwell noticed lying on the table and gave the order to his soldiers, 'Take away that bauble'.

The mace, the symbol of the authority of the House of Commons derived from the Crown, rests on the table in front of the Speaker when the House is in session. It is carried into and from the House by the Sergeant-at-Arms. This official is not a member of the House of Commons but is responsible under the Speaker for maintaining order, even on occasion to the extent of ejecting an unruly member. For this reason, by established custom, he wears a sword.

* There are two other maces of special interest to Canadians. A mace which was carried away by the Americans when they captured York and burned the Legislative Building in 1812, was returned a few years ago as a good-will gesture and is now to be seen in the Museum of old Fort York, Toronto.

A mace was recently presented to the Council of the North-West Territories. It is of Eskimo manufacture, a narwhal's tusk forming the staff, while the crown and decorations are contrived out of materials found in the Arctic.

In the background at the left of the picture there are a number of officers in the uniforms of the navy, army, and air force. These are Her Majesty's Aides-de-camp.

THE AIDES-DE-CAMP

In the days when the King led his own troops in battle he needed a number of trusted officers who could carry his commands to distant parts of the battlefield. Later on the generals who commanded armies had their own officers who served as messengers.*

In modern times a general communicates with his forces more easily by telephone or radio, and in peacetime the office of aide-de-camp is an honorary one, given to high-ranking officers, with duties reduced to personal attendance on the Sovereign or her representative on state occasions.

* In the Crimean War for example the General commanding the British forces, watching the battlefield from a high place, sent an aide-de-camp on horseback with an order to the Light Brigade of cavalry to charge an enemy position, which was visible from the height but not from lower ground. It has never been cleared up whether the charge of the Light Brigade was made toward the position the General intended, and the aide-de-camp was killed soon after delivering the order.

THE SUMMONS TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

As soon as he had escorted the Queen to the throne, Black Rod was sent to order the attendance of the Speaker and members of the House of Commons, in the Senate Chamber to hear the reading of the Speech from the Throne.

There are historical reasons why the Sovereign does not go to the House of Commons and must therefore summon the members to the Senate. King Charles I tried in many ways to interfere with the work of the House of Commons and in 1642 he appeared in the House with soldiers and tried to arrest five members who had displeased him. Since that time there has

been a tradition that the King must never be admitted to the House of Commons and that its members must carefully guard their independence.

It is for this reason that, when Black Rod approached with the summons to the Senate Chamber, the attendants of the House of Commons quickly shut the doors in his face. Black Rod then knocked three times with his staff. To the question "Who is there?" he replied "Black Rod". He was then admitted, advanced a few steps, bowed three times and said, "Mr. Speaker, the Queen commands this honourable House to attend Her Majesty immediately in the Senate Chamber". The members of the House of Commons then followed Black Rod to the Senate Chamber and stood just inside its doors.

Near the main entrances of both the House of Commons and the Senate Chamber a barrier can be set up which is sometimes known as the Bar*. Black Rod delivers his message to the Speaker, standing at the Bar of the House of Commons while the Speaker is in his chair at the other end of the room. The members of the House of Commons when they come to the Senate Chamber stand at its Bar while the Speech is read. The sole exception to this rule is the Prime Minister, who, though he is a member of the House of Commons, enters the Senate Chamber with the Royal procession and sits near the throne. He does this in his capacity as Prime Minister or principal adviser to the Queen.

* The Bar separates the areas reserved for members and non-members of the House. When anyone not a member of the House has committed an offence against the House of Commons he may be summoned to the Bar of the House for questioning; and, if he is found guilty by the House sitting as a Court, he may be sentenced to fine or imprisonment.

THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA

It was at this stage, when the Queen (or her representative the Governor-General) was on the throne in the Senate Chamber, the Senators were in their own place, and the Speaker and members of the House of Commons were standing outside the barrier at the far end, facing the throne, that the Parliament of Canada was all together, as the Queen stated in her opening words.

After the arrival of the members of the Commons there was one more piece of ceremonial, rooted in the long struggle for the independence of the House of Commons, which took place before the Speech from the Throne was read. The Speaker addressed the Queen and asked in the name of the House of Commons that they might be assured liberty of speech and all other rights and privileges which are theirs by custom. When this request was granted the Queen proceeded to read the Speech from the Throne which had been prepared for her by the Prime Minister.

The picture was taken while the Queen was in the act of reading the Speech.

THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The phraseology used in the Speech from the Throne is interesting. The Queen began with the reminder, quoted above, of what constitutes the Parliament of Canada. She went on to

say, "Parliamentary government has been fashioned by the wisdom of many centuries. Its justice, authority, and dignity are cherished by men of good will . . . "

The speech contained such phrases as "My ministers believe . . . ", "You will be asked . . . ", "My ministers will place before you . . . ", which emphasize the constitutional position which the Queen occupies.

Recognizing that legislation relating to taxation and finance must originate in the House of Commons alone*, the Queen addressed these members separately. "Members of the House of Commons, you will be asked to appropriate the sums required for carrying on the government of Canada . . . "

Then in closing she once again addressed herself to both Houses. "Honourable members of the Senate, members of the Commons, I wish to express to you and to the people of Canada my gratitude and that of my husband for the warmth of the loyalty and affection with which we have been welcomed here in Canada. As I now address you here for the first time I will call to your minds the words of the earlier Elizabeth when, more than three centuries ago, she spoke from her heart to the Speaker and members of her last Parliament and said, 'Though God hath raised me high, yet this I count the glory of my crown that I have reigned with your loves'. Now here in the New World I say to you that it is my wish that in the years before me I may so reign in Canada, and be so remembered."

* The struggle over finances between King and Parliament lasted for centuries. The civil war between King Charles I and his Parliament was a direct consequence of this struggle, and the victory for Parliament is reflected in this provision recognized in the Bill of Rights, 1689, that all money bills originate in the House of Commons.

THE RETURN OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

In former times the Speech from the Throne contained the orders of the King to the House of Commons. To assert their independence, instead of turning immediately to the business proposed by the King, the House of Commons would bring forward some business of their own. Now, although the Speech from the Throne is written by the Prime Minister and announces what legislation the Government intends to introduce, the House of Commons as soon as it returns to its own place, still goes through the formality of proclaiming its independence. The Speaker carries back a copy of the Speech and offers to read it again to the House in case there have been any mistakes or omissions. If it is agreed that this is unnecessary a routine bill, unrelated to the programme announced for the session, is immediately brought forward, although it never gets beyond its introductory stage.

In this way the freedom of the House of Commons is asserted, and the assertion serves as a reminder that the members of parliament are elected by the free vote of the people of Canada, and that their decisions are made without outside interference. These decisions are made in the manner which has been established by tradition gradually developed in the Mother of Parliaments, but they are decisions made with the authority of, and for the benefit of the whole Canadian people.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen;
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us;
God save the Queen.

Thy choicest gifts in store,
On her be pleased to pour,
Long may she reign!
May she defend our laws,
And ever give us cause,
To sing with heart and voice,
God save the Queen!

Our loved Dominion bless
With peace and happiness
From shore to shore;
And let our Empire be
United, loyal, free,
True to herself and Thee
For evermore.